

# NATURAL HISTORY MISCELLANEA

Published by  
**The Chicago Academy of Sciences**  
Lincoln Park - 2001 N. Clark St., Chicago 14, Illinois

---

No. 27

October 8, 1948

---

## **The Northern Limit of the Range of *Laemantus serratus***

JAMES A. PETERS\*

The discovery of the rare iguanid lizard, *Laemantus serratus* Cope, in the Gomez Farias region of southwestern Tamaulipas was presaged by the ornithological findings of Sutton and Pettingill (1942) and of Eaton and Edwards (1948). Sutton and Pettingill found the vegetation and avifauna to be distinctly tropical (p. 3) and reported four tropical families and 22 tropical genera of birds in the area. Eaton and Edwards (p. 112) added two more such genera. Most of these groups reach the northern limit of their ranges in this region, only a few being found in Nuevo Leon and Sonora, almost none as far north as Matamoras. This is true also of the lizard genus *Laemantus*, which is typically Central American, and has not been previously reported north of Huasteca Potosina, in extreme northeastern Guanajuato. It applies as well to the genera *Ctenosaura* and *Iguana*, both of which were recorded by Sutton and Pettingill.

A single individual of *Laemantus serratus* (UMMZ 97191) was collected by Ernest P. Edwards at Pano Ayuctle (an Aztec name meaning Pumpkin Ford), along the Rio Sabinas, near the village of Gomez Farias, Tamaulipas. This locality is shown on the map presented by Eaton and Edwards (p. 110). It is the northernmost point from which the genus has been recorded, and probably represents the northern limit of the genus and species. The humid, tropical forest in this locality gives way a short distance to the north to dry mesa country, which extends from the Sierra Madre Oriental almost to the Gulf of Mexico. This dry area undoubtedly acts as a barrier to northward movement of this tropical form.

The specimen is an adult female, containing 7 eggs. The body is badly decomposed and is in two parts, one consisting of the head and chest, the other of the hind legs and tail. Measurements made on these parts are: tail length 485 mm., head length 47 mm., head width 24 mm., hind leg 135 mm., fourth toe on hind leg 52 mm., foreleg 79 mm.

\*Museum of Zoology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

The first two median paired scales on the dorsal surface of the head are followed by a single unpaired scale, flanked by two smaller scales; a third pair of median dorsal scales follows this group of three.

The tail is rounded, slightly spinose anteriorly, the keels on the scales forming continuous ridges, extending through the length of each scale row. As scale rows drop out, the tail assumes an angular appearance, becoming eight-, six-, and finally four-sided, with each scale forming a right angle at the keeled center, with tips of scales flat, not raised in a point. An increase in breadth takes place at the tip of the tail, with wider scales and raised scale tips, giving the appearance of a frayed or knobbed whip end.

The markings of the head are as follows (Fig. 1): large scales on fore head occasionally lined with black; a U-shaped black mark on dorsal surface of head, its base between the posterior corners of eyes, its arms extending backward; a black spot on top of helmet above the U-shaped mark; a very short black stripe extending backward from eye; below this, a second black stripe arising behind loreals and passing beneath eye to tympanum; this stripe bordered below by a light stripe which continues to foreleg. The anterior edges of the first seven upper labials are black. A light stripe on neck a short distance behind the tympanum, bordered below by black.

The lizard fed on caterpillars several times before it was preserved. The stomach contained leaf and stem material from a monocotyledonous type of plant and chitinous remains of insects, apparently orthopteran.

The seven eggs varied from 20 mm. to 24.5 mm. in length (average 22 mm.), and from 11 to 13 mm. in width (average 12.5 mm.).

The range of *Laemantus serratus* may now be defined as extending from southwestern Tamaulipas through the lowlands of the Gulf of Mexico to the Yucatan Peninsula. There is also a record from Tlacolula, Oaxaca, in the literature (Smith and Lafe, 1945, p. 330).

It is fortunate indeed that this specimen while still living was observed by Dr. George M. Sutton. His ability and precision in color observation serve herpetology well in the following color notes, the first known report of the actual color of this species in life.

"One's first impression, on glimpsing the living specimen, was that it was bright green, handsomely and intricately marked with black. But on more careful scrutiny the light, somewhat glaucous blue of the top of the helmet and the strongly bluish cast of the back became apparent. The yellow-green parts were the under parts the throat, lower neck, belly and under side of the legs and tail. The brightest tones faded gradually into the duller tones of the sides and back. The eye was very bright and glittering. The pupil, which was not round, but somewhat triangular, was black. Immediate-

ly surrounding the pupil the iris was bright orange. The periphery of the iris was pale yellow.

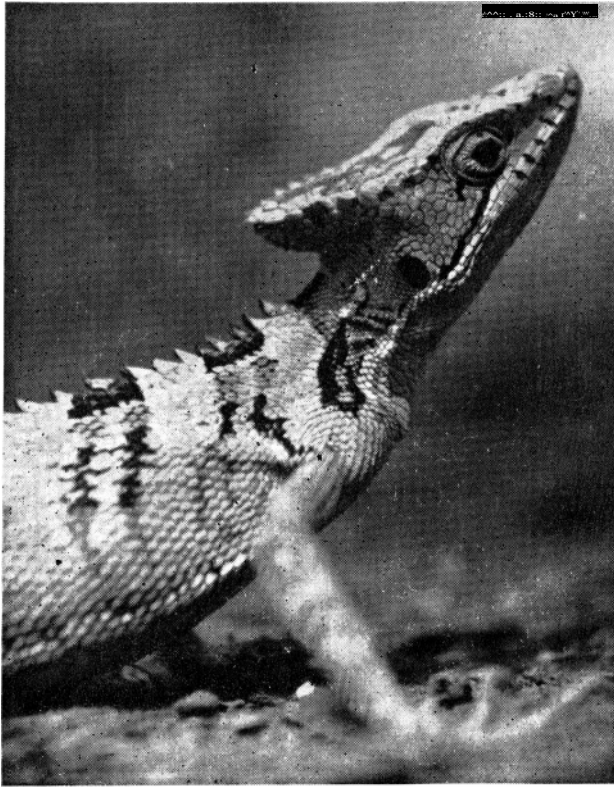


Fig. 1. *Laemanctus serratus*, UMMZ 97191, from life., by Robert Lea.

"The animal was surprisingly sluggish. Even when it opened its mouth and attacked, it lunged forward rather than snapped. This despite the fact that its eye was very alert in expression and its slenderness seemed to suggest great nimbleness and speed."

#### LITERATURE CITED

- Eaton, Stephen W. and Ernest P. Edwards  
 1948 Notes on birds of the Gomez Farias region of Tamaulipas. *Wilson Bull.*,  
 vol. 60, no. 2, p. 109-114, 1 map.
- Smith, Hobart M. and Leonard E. Laufe  
 1945 Mexican amphibians and reptiles in the Texas Cooperative Wildlife Collec-  
 tions. *Trans. Kansas Acad. Sci.*, vol. 48, no. 3, p. 325-354.
- Sutton, George Miksch and Olin Sewall Pettingill, Jr.  
 1942 birds of the Gomez Farias region, southwestern Tamaulipas. *Auk*, vol. 59,  
 no. 1, p. 1-34, pl. 1-6.

*Natural History Miscellanea*, a series of miscellaneous papers initiated in 1946 as an outlet for original articles, more or less technical in nature, one to four pages in length, in any field of natural history. Individual issues, published at irregular intervals, are numbered separately and represent only one field of specialization; e. g., botany, geology, entomology, herpetology, etc. The series is distributed to libraries and scientific organizations with which the Academy maintains exchanges. A title page and index will be supplied to these institutions when a sufficient number of pages to form a volume have been printed. Individual specialists with whom the museum or the various authors maintain exchanges receive those numbers dealing with their particular fields of interest. A reserve is set aside for future exchanges and a supply of each number is available for sale at a nominal price. Authors may obtain copies for their personal exchanges at the prevailing rates for similar reprints.

H. K. Gloyd, Director of the Museum.

*Committee on Publications:*

Alfred Emerson, Hanford Tiffany, and C. L. Turner.